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Directorate of Intelligence
Intelligence Memorandum
Office of African and Latin American Analysis

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Mexico:

Summary

6 MAY 1994

Negotiations between the Mexican Government and the Zapatista National Liberation Army (EZLN) have been inconclusive.

Renewed fighting in Chiapas would exacerbate other pressures on the government and the ruling Institutional Revolutionary Party (PRI).

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Background

After an initial attempt last January to put down the Chiapas rebellion militarily, the Salinas administration adopted a conciliatory approach aimed at quieting its political critics and reassuring the international community and financial markets. The government declared a unilateral cease-fire on 12 January and offered to negotiate. The rebels, probably hoping to acquire a forum and boost their political credibility, agreed to talks mediated by Catholic Bishop Samuel Ruiz. On 2 March, the two sides reached a tentative agreement consisting of Mexico City's responses to 34 EZLN demands. The government already has made good on some provisions, the most important being a package of electoral reforms approved by Congress on 24 March.

Rising Tensions

The failure over the past two months to reach a definitive settlement is causing growing friction involving the rebels, Army, and local landowners. The EZLN, which announced in early March that it was dissatisfied with the government offer, has threatened new attacks in response to Army activities in the area--patrolling, detaining suspected rebels, and collecting intelligence. The seizure of an estimated 20,000 hectares of private land by the EZLN and other peasant groups in recent weeks further heightened unrest. For their part, some ranchers, [REDACTED] and other vested interests in Chiapas resent what they see as Mexico City's appeasement of the rebels, [REDACTED] and they have stepped up harassment of suspected EZLN members and their supporters.¹ [REDACTED]

President Salinas recently has redoubled his efforts to calm anxieties in Chiapas. In a meeting with cattlemen on 19 April, he pledged to restore order in the region and prevent additional land takeovers, according to press reports. One cattlemen said that his group supports negotiations with the EZLN, but cautioned that the situation with regard to land seizures is "critical" and that some landowners will act to defend their property. In addition, Mexico City's decision to release 16 suspected rebels and its conciliatory rhetoric may have caused the EZLN's mood to soften. A rebel communique of 22 April announced the suspension of the EZLN's "red alert" and the resumption of discussions within the movement over new talks.

¹ In the past, landowners have used private armies, called *Brigadas Blancas*, to evict squatters. (U)

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Exemptions: (b)(1) (b)(2)